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Deleuze and Film Semiotics

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Review article

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The territorial imperative in critical theory

On first reflection, none of the usual categories seem to apply to Gilles Deleuze's work in film theory. In fact, Deleuze's texts appear willfully to frustrate the expected set of questions: What is the relation of Deleuze's texts to film theory? What is their relation to semiotics, to the taxonomy and methodology of semiotics as it has been rehearsed by post-structuralist film theoreticians? For that matter, what is their relation to post-structuralism itself? What kind of theoretical system, with the help of which discourses, has Deleuze constructed; or, on the contrary, has Deleuze eschewed 'construction' of a 'system', produced a text of such glacial de-stratification that it becomes, as text, a paradigm of the Body-without-Organs celebrated in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, a text resistant to the subjection of signification? In that case, what is the relation of Deleuze's two volumes of film theory to his previous work, and can the establishment of such a relation explain the variegated enigmas of these texts? What is the relation of this theory, finally, to its object? The last question, at least, Deleuze himself answers in a manner that suggests some of the seeming futility of the previous questions:

> A theory of cinema is not 'about' cinema, but about the concepts that cinema gives rise to and which are themselves related to other concepts corresponding to other practices, the practice of concepts in general having no privilege over others, any more than one object has over others. It is at the level of the interference of many practices that things happen, beings, images, concepts, all the kinds of events. The theory of the cinema does not bear on the cinema, but on the concepts of the cinema, which are no less practical, effective or existent than cinema itself. (p. 280)

Moreover, 'philosophical theory is itself a practice, just as much as its

* Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

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objects' (p. 280). Thus emerges one of the guiding assumptions of Deleuze's work on film, articulated in full already at the outset of the first volume: 'The great directors of the cinema may be compared, in our view, not merely with painters, architects and musicians, but also with thinkers. They think with movement-images and time-images instead of with concepts' (1986: xiv).

The more valid question, in light of Deleuze's proposition, would seem to be that of the relation of his texts on film to the practice of philosophy. Perhaps the most persistent critique of film theory is that having, so to speak, no room of its own, it must repeatedly plunder adjacent disciplines, taking up whatever terminology comes to hand, no matter how rootless that terminology must appear once it is transplanted from its native habitat to the new, untilled ground of film theory.

One of the best examples of this tendency appears in the work of Christian Metz. Metz reads classical film theory as borrowing the trope of 'film language' from the field of linguistics without importing into the system of film theory the necessary and far-reaching implications of the trope. Because, in Metz's view, classical film theory does not articulate its own tradition, but instead insists on coopting the terms of other systems, such a practice must indeed always emerge as a mere 'borrowing', with its attendant implications of opportunism and dilettantism. According to Metz, classical film theory has no legitimate knowledge of or interest in linguistics; film semiotics as practiced by Metz, then, claims to break with classical film theory not by rejecting the trope of film language in favor of one endemic to film theory itself, but by fully exploring the linguistic basis of the trope.

Other examples of what may be called the *territorial imperative* in contemporary theory may be adduced from a range of traditions, but one that seems most instructive for the case of Deleuze is the critique, parallel to Metz's of classical film theory, of literary criticism for its appropriation of the philosophical propositions of deconstruction. Although deconstruction as practiced by, say, Paul de Man declares one of its fundamental principles to be the melding of philosophy and literature, many philosophers who practice deconstruction hold that literary criticism must be seen as parasitical on the tenets of deconstruction, turning those tenets to its own practical uses, wantonly 'applying' deconstruction without the full philosophical engagement deconstruction itself is presumed to imply. The thesis of Gasché (1979), for example, is that, in spite of the meretricious efforts of literary criticism to coopt it, deconstruction will succeed in retaining its own integrity precisely *because* of that deeper philosophical engagement.

Whatever its cultural or professional causes, this territorial imperative

participates, in spite of the claims post-structuralism might make to the contrary, in a fully recognizable post-structuralist rhetoric. Given are two *traditions*, a 'high' and a 'low', the low one feeding off the high, sapping and impurifying it, virally inscribing its nucleus as a foreign strain does that of its host-cell, and simultaneously transmitting the host's energy-giving protoplasms to adjacent, equally parasitical organelles. The 'high' tradition, meanwhile, maintains a relation of indifference, of remote, severe equanimity, to its own invasion, insured of its continued life by virtue of its very venerability. In American film criticism, for example, Stanley Cavell's work on film is routinely denigrated for its lamination of 'high' philosophy and 'low' movie criticism: what Cavell transgresses is the territorial imperative, not from a failure to acknowledge it but from a sustained effort to negotiate it. The philosophical tradition from which Deleuze emerges could not be more different from that of Cavell, yet they share not only this transgression but the conviction that, far from serving only as its object, cinema can *be* philosophy: therefore, claims Deleuze, 'despite the rather overhasty critique of the cinema that Bergson produced shortly after [defining the movement- and time-images], nothing can prevent an encounter between the movement-image, as he considers it, and the cinematographic image' (1986: xiv).

This, then, is the relation of philosophical theory to the cinema, and of Deleuze's work on film to that theory: *nothing can prevent it*! It is, however, a relation not only of inevitability but of mutuality; for Deleuze, philosophy is a *practice*, film is a *practice*, and both are *objects*. Thus, Deleuze consistently treats the work of even such avowedly anti-philosophical filmmakers as Cecil B. DeMille or Howard Hawks as if they were fully conscious of the philosophical gravity of their enterprises. The mutual correspondence of theory and film to philosophy on which Deleuze insists marks his texts, taken together, as constituting a decisive act of what he and Guattari elsewhere call 'deterritorialization'. In *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, where the term receives its fullest treatment, the deterritorial impulse can be either a function of the state-apparatus or a code of resistance to it. On the one hand, 'deterritorialization is a result of the territory itself being taken as an object, as a material to stratify' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 433); on the other, a 'social field is always animated by all kinds of movements of decoding and deterritorialization affecting "masses"... . These are not contradictions but escapes' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 220). The budget of paradoxes constituting *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* assumes that whatever can resist the state-apparatus can also be viewed as a product of it, so that deterritorialization — the refusal of state-appointed boundaries, either geographical or psychical — is often only a stage in the state's reallocation of territory according to its own agenda.

The project of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, however, has so radically transgressed state-appointed *cultural* territories that, unlike much post-structuralist writing, Deleuze and Guattari do not find it necessary to make that transgression one of their topics. (A glance down the columns of the index to *A Thousand Plateaus* yields the following declensions: 'Pinhas, Richard/Pink Panther/Pirenne, Henri; Democritus/DeNiro, Robert/Derrida, Jacques.') Further, deterritorialization not only names but enables that transgression, giving rise to the liberational category of 'multiplicity' in what is, after all — however skeptical, however corrosive — a utopian text. The critique of Freud mounted by Deleuze and Guattari is, on this level, with its contempt for the Freudian master-plot, an act of deterritorialization: 'No sooner does Freud discover the greatest art of the unconscious, this art of molecular multiplicities, than we find him tirelessly at work bringing back molar unities, reverting to his familiar themes of *the* father, *the* penis, *the* vagina, Castration with a capital C' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 27). Similarly, Deleuze's texts on film, while never invoking the principle of the deterritorial, nonetheless seek to realize it.

The crucial link of Deleuze's texts on film to his previous work is precisely this theoretical practice of multiplicity, of particularism, of dispersal, this refusal of consolidation and totality. On one level, such a practice obviously problematizes the questions raised at the outset of this inquiry, questions based precisely on the assumption that a coherent system can be recovered from the texts. Indeed, one could not easily conceive of an approach to Deleuze's texts comparable to, say, the critique of Metz conducted by Brian Henderson (1975). Taking up Metz's scientific claims, Henderson's exacting analysis finds Metz's system to be self-contradictory. Henderson's chief objection to Metz, in fact, is the claim to empiricism Metz's texts make for themselves: 'The definition of an object of analysis without a model defining the field in which this object is constituted commits the complex of errors called empiricism, in which it is assumed that the object exists prior to the analysis and can therefore be apprehended and analyzed directly' (1975: 27–28). According to Henderson, this empiricism is at odds with the phenomenological appeal to experience which Henderson takes to provide the text's real grounding, so that 'Metz's system generates a large number of conflicts even at its first level' (1975: 33).

To approach Deleuze with similar assumptions would be fruitless because of the critique of totalizing systems Deleuze's work enacts. However, unlike Metz's work, which declares film theory a separate entity from film semiotics (1974a: 90), Deleuze's work on film must itself be seen as a critique of film theory. Deleuze's texts may, at some level, remain impervious to such conventional topics of semiotic film analysis as the category of the

syntagmatique, but if we first approach Deleuze's texts as critique of film theory, we may be able to return to those texts *as* film theory with a clearer notion of their predispositions.

Deleuze and Metz

That Deleuze does not situate his work on film within the tradition of semiotics as it has been practiced since Metz may be shown by reviewing *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. There Deleuze defines as a basic image type the 'movement-image': the term has, in one sense, the simplest and most literal of meanings: an image of movement. In its application to film, then, the category might seem merely tautological until the semiotics of Deleuze's deployment of it become apparent: the film image reveals not movement itself but, indeed, an *image* of movement. Moreover, the image is not only of *a* movement — an actor's gesture, say, or an object's trajectory — but *of* movement itself, each image's encoding segments of change as they present themselves to intuition, serving as paradigms for movement as a model of consciousness.

This last term of the argument, the most troublesome for many of Deleuze's readers, adapts Henri Bergson's notably eccentric, indeed anomalous philosophy of movement to film theory in something of the manner of Eisenstein's translation of linguistics or formalism. Deleuze, however, a scholar of Bergson's work and author of an important monograph called *Bergsonism* (1988), painstakingly transports the whole of Bergson's model into his own theoretical complex, making minute distinctions of a type with which film theory has rarely before had to contend.

While a brief sketch is not the place to outline such distinctions, it is clear that the usefulness Deleuze finds in Bergson for film theory is twofold. First, Deleuze categorizes image types according to Bergson's schema of film semiotics. Bergson understands the movement-image, as it exists in the world, as a series of mobile, instantaneous sections of movement, as being divorced from experience and attendant upon intuition: that is, our simple experience of motion is not what interests Bergson; rather, the Bergson of *Matter and Memory* attempts to define the *felt* undercurrent of motion, which he claims we intuit as segments, that causes sensory experience of motion as whole and complete to be superseded by an intuition of motion as isolated segment, pregnant with duration, change, relation, *becoming*. The obvious correlation of this understanding of movement to the *machinery* of cinema is exploited by Deleuze, who opts for a 'naive' understanding of film that never becomes habituated to the illusionist novelty of the film apparatus, and, thus, finds it possible to declare film

the very realization of Bergson's theses. The second, more general principle Deleuze takes from Bergson, in addition to this procedure of taxonomy, is his conception of the sensory-motor relation of mind to world, which will become important in *Cinema 2*.

It will be seen that, in fact, Deleuze's operations here seem not entirely alien to those of film semiotics as practiced conventionally, especially in his concern with part/whole relations, a concern that still largely defines the field at its most basic level — with where and how to segment films for analysis and with how to code linkages among sections. Unlike most film semioticians, however, but fully in keeping with both the model of Bergson and his own habits of theoretical practice, Deleuze entirely discredits the stability of a 'Whole' to which the parts might add up or to which they might be seen as adjunct:

> In fact, to recompense movement with *eternal poses* or with *immobile sections* comes to the same thing: in both cases, one misses the movement because one constructs a Whole, one assumes that 'all is given', whilst movement only occurs if the whole is neither given nor giveable. As soon as a whole is given to one in the eternal order of forms or poses, or in the set of any-instant-whatevers, then either time is no more than the image of eternity, or it is the consequence of the set; there is no longer room for real movement. (1986: 7)

Moreover, the movement-image as Deleuze defines it cannot be seen as equivalent to a traceable film segment. On occasion, Deleuze identifies the movement-image with the *shot*: 'The shot is the movement-image. In so far as it relates movement to a whole which changes, it is the mobile section of duration' (1986: 22). Discussing the movement-image earlier in the context of Bergson's work, however, Deleuze has made it clear that such one-to-one correspondence of the concept to discrete units of filmic discourse is entirely impracticable. The movement-image often goes beyond the shot, so that a movement-image comprises a complete action of however many shots, or else it is broken down to such an extent that it could be said to consist of a single film frame (as also happens in the work of Barthes [1977]):

> The determining conditions of the cinema are the following: not merely the photo, but the snapshot (the long-exposure photo [*photo de pose*] belongs to the other lineage [that of pre-cinema]); the equidistance of snapshots; the transfer of this equidistance onto a framework which constitutes the 'film'...; a mechanism for moving on images (Lumiere's claws). It is in this sense that the cinema is the system which reproduces movement as a function of any-instant-whatever that is, as a function of equidistant instants, selected so as to create an impression of continuity. (1986: 5)

Here the movement-image is successively identified with the snapshot, the 'instant', the 'moment', or the dramatic scene, no one of which can be understood as coextensive with the shot as a filmic unit.

The three types of images Deleuze derives from the movement-image are the perception-, affection-, and action-image:

> We already have, therefore, four kinds of images: firstly *movement-images*. Then, when they are related to a center of indetermination, they divide into three varieties — *perception-images, action-images, affection-images*. There is every reason to believe that many other kinds of images can exist. Indeed, the plane of movement-images is the mobile section of a Whole which changes, that is, of a duration or of a 'universal becoming'. (1986: 68)

Briefly, the perception-image defines the viewpoint of a figure in film, the affection-image designates bodily expression, and the action-image unfolds a trajectory of physical agency. Like the movement-image itself, then, each of these categories is capable of exceeding the individual shot, of proceeding over a number of shots, because they have not been defined in the terms of *technical* segmentation that would classify a shot, for example, as — in Metz's terms — the 'smallest unit' of filmic signification. Rather, Deleuze defines image-types according to the content of the image, subverting immediately the problematic division in early film semiotics of formal segmentation from the operable codes of narrative or affective structure and, at the same time, implicitly rejecting Metz's claim that to delineate the *measure* or *scale* of units is a key concern of film semiotics.

One example, though perhaps a localized one, of how Deleuze's reorientation of filmic segmentation *solves*, instead of raises, some problems of film signification may be seen by considering optical 'tricks' of the type that Metz's system avoids (1974a: 106). In one of Méliès's famous 'trick-films', the illusion of a disappearing bus was produced by the use of in-camera editing: the camera recorded the bus's approach to the Paris opera-house but was stopped for a moment as the bus passed from the camera's frame of view; finally, after the bus had gone, the camera was cranked again to record the bus's seemingly magical absence.

Metzian semiotics could well find itself having to deal with the question, in approaching such an instance, of whether this segment could be considered a *single* shot, since it consists, in fact, of two separate operations of the camera, and potentially two separate units, perhaps necessitating a redefinition of the shot as a signifying element constituted by any number of frames that give the impression, for however long a duration, of the camera's continued perception of a particular spatial or temporal site.

One could cite, as well, examples at another extreme of films consisting of a single shot or very few long-held shots, where again Metz's emphasis

on *measure*, and his conclusion that the shot is the 'smallest' unit of film signification, would not prove very useful. By initially integrating affective with formal codes, Deleuze's theory need not, at least at its first level, raise such issues, and can readily classify the Méliès example — a series of the phases of a continuous action — as an action-image that shows 'the relation between [milieux and modes of behavior] and all the varieties of this relation' (1986: 141), the 'milieu' of the Paris opera-house and the 'mode of behavior' of the 'trick-film', spectral class-consciousness encountering the auratic nimbus of play.

Deleuze's text allows, then, not only for the classification of images themselves but, by extension, of narrative — of the 'Whole-which-changes' of which images are 'mobile sections':

> A film is never made up of a single kind of image: thus we call the combination of the three varieties, montage. Montage (in one of its aspects) is the assemblage [*agencement*] of movement-images, hence the inter-assemblage of perception-images, affection-images and action-images. Nevertheless, a film, at least in its most simple characteristics, always has one type of image which is dominant: one can speak of an active, perceptive or affective montage, depending on the predominant type. ... These three kinds of spatially determined shots can be made to correspond to these three kinds of varieties: the long-shot would be primarily a perception-image; the medium-shot an action-image; the close-up an affection-image. But, at the same time, according to one of Eisenstein's instructions, each of these movement-images is a point of view on the whole of the film, a way of grasping this whole, which becomes affective in the close-up, active in the medium-shot, perceptive in the long-shot — each of these shots ceasing to be spatial in order to become itself a 'reading' of the whole film. (1986: 70)

Metz's work is often read as following a trajectory from the problematic categories of *Film Language*, where narrative is assumed to be a signifying process that runs parallel to that of the image-track without quite making full contact with it, to the fusion of these dual tracks presumably achieved in *The Imaginary Signifier* by appealing largely to psychoanalytic (rather than to structuralist or phenomenological) models that link segments of the *grande syntagmatique* through an analysis of the structuring codes of desire. Thus in 'Notes toward a phenomenology of narrative' in *Film Language* Metz speaks of the 'opposition between the narrative and the image' (1974a: 19), while his critique in *The Imaginary Signifier* of the distinction between primary and secondary processes can be understood as a critique of that very opposition: 'There is no such thing as primary and no such thing as secondary; there are only secondarizations with their degrees and modalities' (1982: 325).

To be sure, Metz himself is as fully aware of the changing methods and

shifts in emphasis of his work as any of his readers could be, and he frequently rejects explicitly his early models in favor of modified versions of them, while always retaining the governing principle of the *grande syntagmatique*.

My point is that it is Metz's work that is taken to be paradigmatic of the trajectory of film semiotics as theoretical practice.

Indeed, the narrative constructed by Kaja Silverman's influential work *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983), as implied by the title of the chapter 'From sign to subject', is precisely the Metzian trajectory from the purely taxonomic to the definitively psychoanalytic: the study of signification cannot be divorced from psychoanalysis, Silverman claims, because 'signification occurs only through discourse ... each discourse requires a subject, and ... the subject itself is an effect of discourse' (p. vii).

If in *Cinema 1* Deleuze implicitly critiques the dominant practices of film semiotics, in *Cinema 2* he does so quite explicitly. Because the second of Deleuze's texts on film is chiefly concerned with what he calls the *time-image*, the problem of narrative becomes even more important to the enterprise than in the first book. At the outset of *Cinema 2*, then, Deleuze deals specifically with the relation created by Metzian semiotics of the image-track to narration:

> The first difficulty concerns narration: this is not an evident [*apparent*] given in cinematographic images in general, even ones which are historically established. There can certainly be no quarrel with the passages in which Metz analyses the historical fact of the American model which was constituted as cinema of narration. And he recognizes that this narration itself indirectly presupposes montage: the fact is that there are many linguistic codes that interfere with the narrative code or the syntagmatics (not only montages, but punctuations, audio-visual connections, camera movements...). Similarly, Christian Metz has no insurmountable difficulty in accounting for the deliberate disturbances of narration in modern cinema: it is enough to point to changes of structure in the syntagmatics. The difficulty is therefore elsewhere; it is that, for Metz, narration refers to one of several codes as underlying linguistic determinants from which it flows into the image in the shape of an evident given. On the contrary, it seems to us that narration is only a consequence of the visible [*apparent*] images themselves and their direct combination — it is never given. (p. 26)

Again, the problem for Deleuze is that the system 'assumes that the image can in fact be assimilated to an utterance' (p. 26). In Deleuze's reading of Metz, Metz must exclude any phase of semiotic analysis that assumes or demands a kind of synaptic exchange between the image-track and narration: thus where the linguist Hjelmslev, according to Deleuze,

'identifies the semiotic function with the linguistic one' (p. 287), Metz must ignore this identification in his analysis of Hjelmslev.

Deleuze's critique of Metz takes shape, in fact, around the two most frequently noted objections to Metz's work: the autonomy Metz's system grants to the distinct layers of expression and narration and the privileging of the syntagmatics of expression. This critique assumes a central distinction between semiology and semiotics, which Deleuze elsewhere in the text articulates fully:

> We can understand from [assuming the signifiable to be the condition of linguistics] the ambiguity which runs through semiotics and semiology: semiology, which is of linguistic inspiration, tends to close the 'signifier' in on itself, and cut language off from the images and signs that make up its raw material. Semiotics, by contrast, is the discipline which considers language only in relation to this specific content: images and signs. Of course, when language takes over the content or the utterable it makes from them properly linguistic utterances which are no longer expressed in images and signs. ... It seemed to us that cinema, precisely through its automatic or psychomechanical qualities, was the system of pre-linguistic images and signs and that it took utterances up again in the images and signs proper to this system. (p. 262)

In this version, the practice of semiotics need not pass through a series of generalized formal codes, those Deleuze associates with the *language system*, in order to reach the cultural codes of specific utterances or images. Unlike semiology, which presumably must follow these determined stages, semiotics subsumes both types of codes — is, in fact, predicated on the assimilation of formal and cultural codes. From this perspective, Barthes's *S/Z* (1974) could serve as an example of a semiological analysis which, though it proclaims the inseparability of formal from cultural codes, in practice turns to cultural codes last, as a function of formal codes. On the basis of the distinction Deleuze makes between these two types of theoretical practice, he claims that

> Cinema is not a universal or primitive language system [*langue*], nor a language [*langage*]. It brings to light an intelligible content which is like a presupposition, a condition, a necessary correlate through which language constructs its own 'objects' (signifying units and operations). But this correlate, though inseparable, is specific: it consists of movements and thought-processes (pre-linguistic images), and of points-of-view on these movements and processes (pre-signifying signs). (p. 262)

Deleuze's critique of Metz has two results. First, it enables him to discuss all elements of filmic discourse as signifiers of potentially equal value. The sound-track, for example, notoriously devalued in Metz's discourse, is in Deleuze's placed on a level equal to that of narration or of the image

track. Because of this new equilibrium of the components of filmic discourse, Deleuze finds that the 'break between the silent film and the talkie has never seemed fundamental in the cinema's evolution' (p. 262) since — understood as an image in its own right, an image of sound as the visual text is an image of movement — the sound-image has always already been present:

> Silent or talkie, we have seen, cinema constitutes an immense 'internal monologue' which constantly internalizes and externalizes itself: not a language, but a visual material which is the utterable of language (its 'signified of power' the linguist Gustave Guillaume would say), and which refers in one case to indirect utterances (intertitles), in the other case to direct enunciations (acts of speech and of music). (p. 241)

This conception of the sound-image elsewhere leads Deleuze to speak of the auditory codes governing phases of a type of the time-image, the recollection-image. Deleuze's analysis of the work of Joseph Mankiewicz, for example, is heavily reliant on the signifying value of aural codes. Deleuze speaks of the voice in Mankiewicz as that which 'frames' memory:

> In its very essence, memory is voice, which speaks, talks to itself, or whispers, and recounts what happened. Hence the voice-off which accompanies the flashback. In Mankiewicz this spiritual role of memory often gives way to a creature more or less connected with the beyond. ... In any event, the voice as memory frames the flashback. But, in another sense, what the latter 'shows', and what the former reports, are more voices: characters and decors which are of course meant to be seen, but are in essence speaking and of sound. (p. 51)

More important, Deleuze's critique of Metz underlines the theory of film history Deleuze's work proposes. Taken together, Deleuze's texts on film construct a version of film history linked to the semiotic categories he explores — an effort to trace the evolution and development of film through semiotics, a narration of narrations as it were (since, in contrast to Metz whose theory makes no claims to accounting for film history, Deleuze claims that 'cinema is always narrative' [p. 137]).

The trajectory Deleuze outlines is from the movement-image of *Cinema 1* with its expressive force and novel animations to the time-image of *Cinema 2* with its uncanny isolations, its false-continuities, its disturbing sense of tracking and chronicling the break-down of conventional sensory-motor processes. This evolution can be understood as coincident with other historical movements: from pre- to post-World War II, from 'classical' to 'modern', from truthful to falsifying narrations. The truthful narration of 'classical' cinema, according to Deleuze, is 'developed organically, accord-

ing to legal connections in space and chronological relations in time (p. 133):

> Falsifying narration, by contrast, frees itself from this system. ... Narration is constantly being completely modified, in each of its episodes, not according to subjective variations, but as a consequence of disconnected places and de-chronologized movements. There is a fundamental reason for this new situation: contrary to the form of the true which is unifying and tends to the identification of a character (his discovery or simply his coherence), the power of the false *cannot be separated from an irreducible multiplicity*. 'I is another' ['*Je est un autre*'] has replaced Ego = Ego. (p. 133, emphasis mine)

Given the recurrence of that potent term, it is clear that conventional semiotic relations, for Deleuze, cannot hold even in the regulated sphere of narration in the light of 'multiplicity', and the issue of falsifying narrative as a defining element of modern cinema leads Deleuze back to the distinction between semiology and semiotics:

> Semiology of a linguistic inspiration, semiocritique, has addressed the problem of falsifying narrations as part of rich and complex studies of the 'dys-narrative'. But since it identified the cinematographic image with an utterance, and every sequence with a narration in general, the differences between narrations could come only from language processes which constituted an intellectual structure underlying the images. What constituted this structure was the syntagm and the paradigm, which were both complementary, but under conditions which meant that the second remained weak and undetermined while the first alone was decisive in traditional narration [Christian Metz]. Hence, it only needs the paradigm to become crucial to the structural order, or the structure to become 'serial', for narration to lose the accumulative, homogeneous and identifiable character that it owed to the primacy of the syntagm. (p. 136)

Rejecting the Metzian hierarchies — of sound and image, of image-track and narration, of syntagm and paradigm — Deleuze reclaims, as semiotics had often attempted to do, the strictly perceptible as a category for semiosis:

> The diversity of narrations cannot be explained by the avatars of the signifier, by the states of a linguistic structure which is assumed to underlie images in general. It relates only to perceptible forms of images and to corresponding sensory signs which presuppose no narration but from which derives one narration rather than another. Perceptible types cannot be replaced by the processes of language. (p. 137)

One may object that the theory of film history proposed by Deleuze's texts is itself essentialist, presuming certain unassailable historical givens, certain indisputable causalities, challenging a suspect hierarchy with a new — albeit 'multiplicitous' — one. The historical model on which

Deleuze draws can be called Hegelian as surely as can that of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* with its sense of the triadic evolution of cultures, from the primitive to the despotic to the capitalist. In fact, a simplified version of Deleuze's conception of film history might read something like this: We begin with the *pure* movement-image (the silent film), its state pre-lingual and ideal but nonetheless pointing forward to a condition of higher development (the acquisition of sound) which it finally achieves. Gradually playing out all its forms, the movement-image then reaches an 'impasse' and finally gives way to what lies 'beyond' it, the time-image, which recommences the trajectory.

The romanticist underpinnings of such a conception clearly need not be adumbrated, and traces of that romanticism certainly cling to Deleuze's texts. Deleuze's continued opposition of semiology to the 'pure semiotics' he favors, with its attendant rhetoric of essentialism, further bespeaks such traces. It must be understood, however, that Deleuze's theory of film presupposes a *philosophy* of history Deleuze is at pains to distinguish from his account of power-dynamics in film (pp. 76–78; pp. 218–222). The movement from truthful to falsifying narration is the consequence, Deleuze argues, of an epistemological crisis rather than a political one:

> If we take the history of thought, we see that time has always put the notion of truth into crisis. Not that truth varies depending on the epoch. It is not the simple empirical content, it is the form or rather the pure force of time which puts truth into crisis. Since antiquity this crisis has burst out in the paradox of 'contingent futures'. (p. 130)

At the same time, if Deleuze's formulation does constitute a 'master-narrative' of the type we might expect his texts to challenge, this 'master-narrative' begins to disperse as the discourse proceeds. If we ask, therefore, what relation Deleuze establishes between the 'classic' and the 'modern' text, we find that the seemingly schematic, bipolar arrangement of Deleuze's texts yields no easy answer. At times Deleuze appears to identify silent cinema with the classic period and sound cinema with the modern; at other times he denies such an identification and eschews any form of periodization, speaking of 'classic' and 'modern' as styles, modes of operation, methods of approach not moored to any easily recoverable temporal categories. It is characteristic of Deleuze's texts to proceed from apparently dialectical models but to undermine such models in execution.

Perhaps the most important questions raised by Deleuze's critique of Metz will return us to the relation of Deleuze's work to post-Metzian film semiotics. Deleuze's treatment of Metz's theory concentrates almost exclusively on his early work, but when Deleuze does turn to *The Imaginary Signifier*, he finds that for all Metz's revaluation of his categories and those

of his followers, 'nothing changed in the hypothesis of semiology' (p. 285). Of course, something basic did change in Metz's own system: the growing attention to forms of culturally coded desire as a generating mechanism of texts.

A critique of Metz perhaps more in keeping than Deleuze's with the dominant tendencies of contemporary film semiotics is represented by Teresa de Lauretis's claim that 'Metz's work on *la grande syntagmatique* left little room for a consideration of the working of desire in narrative structuration ...' (1984: 107). It is a claim that the Metz of *The Imaginary Signifier* would fully accept, and that film semioticians have since assumed as basic to their enterprise.

The alliance of semiotics and psychoanalysis in film study perhaps necessarily marginalizes a figure such as Deleuze; while Deleuze is, as we have seen, centrally concerned with many of the vital issues of conventional film semiotics, he never adopts the Freudian or Lacanian models — of which he is, of course, overtly critical in many of his other works — that most film semioticians deem, for practical purposes, identical with semiotics. Having seen how Deleuze's reconception of film signification places, for example, the image-track in a new relation to narrative, we will now examine, from a different vantage point, Deleuze's treatment of crucial issues of psychoanalytic semiotics, specifically of figures of desire and of the problem of figuration itself, issues often understood to challenge the very bases of semiotics.

Deleuze and psychoanalytic semiotics

The inseparability of psychoanalysis from semiotics is assumed to turn on the question of desire. In the Lacanian model favored by contemporary psychoanalytic semiotics, the birth of desire follows the subject's self-alienation. After an originary state of wholeness, the subject learns of a constitutive lack governing his or her experience — the lack of the penis in Oedipal models, the lack of the idealized image of the self in the mirror, the lack of a fulfilling entry into what Lacan calls the symbolic order — which lack the subject attempts to appease or reconstitute through desire. Because desire is itself a regulated mechanism within the symbolic order, it becomes the site of contesting signifiers, the very space of semiosis. To return to Deleuze in this context, the question becomes — especially in light of Deleuze's critique of early Metz — what room is there in Deleuze's discourse for discussion of desire in narrative, and how might such discussion proceed?

One possible entry into such a discussion is by way of Deleuze's concep-

tion of subjectivity. In other words, *who* is the spectator of film as Deleuze theorizes it? In contemporary film semiotics, the term 'subject' is commonly used to designate the spectator who is, in a sense, created by the signifying practices of particular films. The 'woman's melodrama' of the 1940s, for example, produces a subject who is dependably white, female, and middle-class (Doane 1987). In a larger sense, as Kaja Silverman suggests, the term 'helps us to conceive of human reality as a construction, as the product of signifying activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious' (1983: 130). Subjectivity is, to be sure, something like the *grande syntagmatique* of psychoanalytic semiotics. It is the bristling series of signifieds which textual signifiers both address and invent; as such, it is clearly predicated on the idea of lack.

The co-author of the most sustained assault on the idea of lack in psychoanalytic discourse, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Deleuze can hardly be expected to take up such a model in his work on film: the question, however, is whether he has abandoned the model of his earlier work. The conception of subjectivity that emerges from *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is in many ways congruent with that of psychoanalytic semiotics. In that text, the subject *is* seen as the creation of cultural and economic codes, but Deleuze and Guattari make there an all-important distinction, a function of their critique of psychoanalysis, with large implication for Deleuze's texts on film:

> This [taking *I* as the subject of the statement] is not, however, a question of a linguistic operation, for a subject is never the condition of possibility of language or the cause of the statement: there is no subject, only collective assemblages of enunciation. Subjectification is simply one such assemblage and designates a formalization of expression or a regime of signs rather than a condition internal to language. (1988: 130)

It is worth noting that this relation of the subject to language is analogous to that Deleuze establishes between the narrative whole and its image-components in *Cinema 1* and *2*. Like the narrative whole, the subject here must not be seen as a *given* effect of language. As in Deleuze's film semiotics, so here Deleuze and Guattari point toward a form of semiotics outside linguistics, not because they deny the primacy of language in human experience but because they so radically assume it that they must avoid any implication of one term's — language or experience — preceding or superseding the other. Both language and 'subjectification' are, like all other 'assemblages', an 'organization of power that is already fully functioning in the economy, rather than superimposing itself upon contents or relations between contents determined as real in the last instance' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 130).

In *Cinema 2*, subjectivity is a function of filmic discourse, created or made to 'appear' through that discourse, but while psychoanalytic semiotics defines such creation largely in terms of sexual difference, the Deleuzean subject remains ungendered:

> We have seen that subjectivity already emerged in the movement-image; it appears as soon as there is a gap between a received and an executed movement, an action and a reaction, a stimulation and a response, a perception-image and an action-image. And if affection itself is also a dimension of this first subjectivity, it is because it belongs to the gap, it constitutes its 'insides', it in a sense occupies it, but without filling or fulfilling it. (p. 47)

In spite of what may be seen as the sexualized rhetoric of this passage, the Deleuzean subject is not only eternalized and asexual, but Deleuze explicitly denies the importance of sexual difference in specific texts that decisively raise such issues. In his discussion of the work of Chantal Akerman, Deleuze characterizes the female body as 'fluid', 'open' 'revelatory', 'nomadic':

> The states of the body secrete the slow ceremony which joins together the corresponding attitudes, and develop a female gest which overcomes the history of men and the crisis of the world. It is this gest which reacts on the body giving it a hieratism like an austere theatricalization, or rather a 'stylization'. (p. 196)

Having so characterized the female body, however, Deleuze goes on to claim that

> Female authors, female directors, do not owe their importance to a militant feminism. What is more important is the way they have produced innovations in this cinema of bodies, as if women had to conquer the source of their own attitudes and the temporality which coresponds to them as individual or common gest. (pp. 196–97)

Similarly, after cataloguing the homoerotic codes operable in the work of Luchino Visconti, Deleuze warns, 'However, let us not think that homosexuality is Deleuze's obsession...' (p. 96). In each case, Deleuze holds out the promise of theorizing sexual differences in the terms of philosophical semiotics; in each case, he turns away from such a possibility by adverting to some 'larger' context in which the importance of sexual difference seemingly dissipates.

These two examples, characteristic of Deleuze's handling of the question of sexual difference in film, must be pursued further to show the irrelevance to Deleuze's text of such a concept as identification, a central issue in the treatment of desire in narration in psychoanalytic semiotics. In spite of

Deleuze's positioning of the subject within a social field as a function of signifiers, the very positioning on which psychoanalytic semiotics insists, Deleuze does not then proceed to, in de Lauretis's words, 'an interruption of the triple track by which narrative, meaning, and pleasure are constructed from [an Oedipal] point of view' (1984: 157). Indeed, the female body Deleuze sees in Akerman's work remains very much a specular body, a body that is as it is by virtue of its perceived relation to maleness — which, however, Deleuze never similarly defines in his discussion of this 'cinema of bodies'. One of the defining features of the female body as Deleuze sees it is its status as 'a revelation to men' (p. 196); in fact, it 'serves' as such a revelation, 'whilst the men speak for society, the environment, the part which is their due, the piece of history which they bring with them' (p. 196). In other words, the female *body* is associated with a 'strange nomadism which makes it cross ages, situations and places' (p. 196), while the male *voice* (speaking *for* society and *of* itself) is fully material, influencing a social field with earnest proclamation instead of with sly gest, bound by acts of history instead of escaping into a presumably liberatory but thoroughly trans-historical space. (Readers of Deleuze's work will recognize this 'nomadic' impulse as harking back to Deleuze's work on Nietzsche [1973]).

For all Deleuze's celebrations of the subversive force of this body (or, for that matter, of Deleuze's Nietzsche), it continues to resemble one which has been, in the words of Kaja Silverman on the fate of the woman's body in theory, 'charted, zoned, made to bear ... a meaning which proceeds entirely from external relationships, but which is *always subsequently apprehended as an internal condition or essence*' (quoted in de Lauretis 1984: 183; emphasis mine).

The female body Deleuze sees in Akerman's work is 'not closed' (p. 196), but this very same openness he celebrates is, in fact, in other versions of the body's semiotics, precisely the most decisive sign of female lack, both the site of the female body's most potent threat to the male with its implication of his own potential castration and the site he must therefore *conquer* by introducing the 'plenitude', the 'closure' of the phallus. Deleuze reflects here on the body as image instead of on the image of the body as product of narration, but even so the Deleuzean body emerges as curiously Oedipalized: it is given as seen by men, it is set into opposition not with the signifiers of the male *body* but with the authority of the male *voice*, and whatever subjectivity it bodies forth is, though potentially subversive, also defined as 'light' and 'gay'.

Thus that subjectivity seems largely rhetorical, for the question Deleuze has *not* asked is one central to psychoanalytic semiotics: 'Whose desire is it that *speaks*, and whom does that desire address?' (de Lauretis 1984: 112;

emphasis mine). If Deleuze does read the sign of 'openness' as potentially subversive of a male order, however, his treatment of homoerotics in Visconti more conventionally associates the lack which might otherwise attend such openness with an equally universalized account of homosexual desire. Homosexuality in Visconti is associated with what Deleuze calls the 'too-late' in Visconti's work, the belated recognition of lack after it might have been fulfilled:

> This something that comes too late is always the perceptual and sensual revelation of a unity of nature and man. *Thus it is not a simple lack*: it is the mode of being of this grandiose revelation... . Thus the shattering revelation of the musician in *Death in Venice*, when through the young boy he has a vision of what has been lacking in his work: sensual beauty. It is the unbearable revelation of the teacher in *Conversation Piece*, when he discovers a petty criminal in the young man, his lover in nature and his son in culture. (p. 96; emphasis mine)

Deleuze's decoding of Visconti's homoerotics has much in common with his reading of the female body in Akerman. In both cases, signifiers initially pointing to exclusion or lack are secondarily recuperated as redemptive; thus in the analysis of Akerman the Oedipal body Deleuze finds there is granted liberatory agency while in the analysis of Visconti 'the possibility of homosexuality arose as the chance of salvation, of escaping from a stifling past, but too late' (p. 96). At the same time, both the feminine and the homoerotic are constructed through exclusion of the category of identification as Other on the one hand and neutralized because 'universal' on the other hand.

A related issue is worth touching on briefly, to be discussed more fully elsewhere. Deleuze's comments on the issue of figuration suggest further a certain specific distance of Deleuze's texts from psychoanalytic semiotics. The intervention of psychoanalysis in semiotics raises forcefully the issue of figuration, which for the psychoanalyst problematizes the relation of sign to subject and of signifier to signified. By transgressing the ordinary logic of grammar and syntax, metaphor and metonymy potentially threaten the neat correlates of Saussurean linguistics. For psychoanalytic semiotics, therefore, metaphor and metonymy announce the intrusion of the unconscious into signifying processes.

Although Deleuze insists on the primacy of figuration in filmic discourse, he does so in much the same spirit in which his handling of sexual difference is couched.

Metz's late work, of course, takes up the issue of figuration as the *key* to desire's operation in film narrative, but Deleuze regards figuration as a first-level function of filmic signification:

Jakobson noted that cinema is typically metonymic because it essentially proceeds by juxtaposition and contiguity: it does not have metaphor's specific power of giving a 'subject' the verb or action of another subject: it has to juxtapose the two subjects, and so make metaphor subject to a metonymy. ... [This restriction] is true if we compare the cinematographic image to an utterance. It is false if we take the cinematographic image for what it is; movement-image which, as well as dividing movement by connecting it to the objects between which it is established (metonymy which separates images), can *dissolve* movement by connecting it with the whole that it expresses (metaphor which connects images). (p. 160)

For Metz, figuration occurs along a signifying *chain*, and Metz's notion of the figure as a type of textual organization derives from Lacan's idea of metaphor as semiological substitution: '[Metaphor] flashes between two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present through its (metonymic) connexion with the rest of the chain' (Lacan 1977: 157). Such a notion, predicated on the Lacanian comparison of the structure of the unconscious to that of a language, has been criticized by Jean-François Lyotard as a reductive effort to subordinate the workings of the unconscious to those of linguistic signification — as, in fact, a denial of the primal force of the unconscious and of figuration, which may not be amenable to semiotics (Lyotard 1971).

Metz's Lacanian assumptions lead him to classify figures largely according to syntagmatic operations: a film metaphor, in other words, achieves that status only by means of its relation to other segments of the film text, thus recuperating metaphor under the aspects of grammar and syntax. Deleuze, on the other hand, is closer to Lyotard in his negation of the importance of the signifying chain in defining the figural. While he recognizes the function of montage in generating certain types of metaphors, he does not regard montage as the chief means of creating figures in film; in fact, for Deleuze, syntagmatic juxtaposition is not a necessary phase of cinematic figuration: 'cinema also achieves metaphors in the image and without montage' (p. 160).

On the contrary, metaphor becomes, for Deleuze, a source of conceptual practice in film, creating a relation between text, author, and subject much as figuration is assumed to do in psychoanalytic semiotics, but to the quite different end of producing a cinema of concept, of philosophy:

Metaphor is sometimes extrinsic, sometimes intrinsic. But, in both cases, the composition does not simply express the way the character experiences himself, but also expresses the way in which the author and his viewer judge him.... A circuit which includes simultaneously the author, the film and the viewer is elaborated. The complete circuit thus includes the sensory shock which raises us from

the images to conscious thought, then the thinking in figures which takes us back to the images and gives us an affective shock again. Making the two coexist, joining the highest degree of consciousness to the deepest level of the unconscious: this is the dialectical automaton.... The whole forms a knowledge, in the Hegelian fashion, which brings together the image and the concept as two movements each of which goes towards the other. (p. 161)

In tracing these differences of emphasis, then, it may be that I have only been elaborating differences of approach between 'schools' of semiotic film analysis, the psychoanalytic and the philosophical. When in the last chapter of *Alice Doesn't* Teresa de Lauretis mounts a similar investigation in placing Lacan beside Peirce, she reaches the conclusion that while psychoanalysis centralizes desire as (a-temporalized and language-bound) experience, philosophy produces 'desire as something of a conceptual nature' (1984: 181). Neither, though, seems equipped to answer the question of how the subject (especially for de Lauretis the female subject) constitutes itself or is constituted.

If we return one last time to Deleuze's remarks on the subject, we see that this very topic calls forth Deleuze's most sustained ardor: '[In the context of the time-image] Subjectivity, then, takes on a new sense, which is no longer motor or material, but temporal and spiritual: that which "is added" to matter, not what distends it; recollection-image, not movement-image' (p. 47). Here the Deleuzean subject, perfectly in keeping with Deleuze's earlier statements on the subject, is fulfilled, complete, 'temporal' but eternal-because-'spiritual', radically *sublime*. Deleuze's rhetoric of absolutes, of essences, of infinites, of the spiritual and eternal, makes sense as the thematization of something like a 'sublime subject' which has escaped or gone beyond the 'regime of signs':

> Time as open and changing totality none the less goes beyond all the movements, even the personal changes of the soul or affective movements, even though it cannot do without them. It is thus caught in an indirect representation, because it cannot do without movement-images which express it, and yet goes beyond all relative movements forcing us to think an absolute of the movements of bodies, an infinity of the movement of light, a backgroundless [*sans fond*] of the movement of souls, the sublime. (p. 238)

Thus Deleuze's text, in spite of its initial appearance or marginality within semiotic discourse, takes its place in a line of rigorously self-critical semiotic writings, such as those of Juri Lotman. According to Lotman, one of the 'consistent dialectical contradictions of human civilization' (1981: 11) is our longing for the wisdom conferred by the sign — money, social symbols, the word itself — and our simultaneous yearning for freedom from the

sign. Lotman goes on to subject semiotics to rigorous scrutiny, posing the question, 'Can we have a sign system without signs?' (1981: 35):

> 'Writing' as a text is distinctly divided into discrete units, signs.... A picture ... is not divided into discrete units. ... In the first case, the sign is primal, existing before the text. The text is composed of signs. In the second case the text is primal. A sign is either identical to a text, or is singled out through a secondary operation, an analog of a linguistic message. In a certain respect, then, a sign system without signs (using measures of a higher order, texts) is not a paradox but a reality, one of two possible types of semiosis. (1981: 37)

The analysis of Antonioni's film *Blow-Up* (1966) with which Lotman ends his study posits the idea, in keeping with this longing for freedom from the sign which cinema may make possible, that 'acknowledging the text to be incomprehensible is a necessary stage on the way to a new understanding' (1981: 99).

A 'sign system without signs' is precisely what Deleuze, in his sustained critique of semiosis, attempts to construct. Like the work of Lotman, Lyotard, or Julia Kristeva, then, Deleuze's texts are best understood not as critique *of* theory but as critique *as* theory.

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